

How to Cite:**Dr. Indhu M. Eapen (July 2020). Myth Criticism: Theory and Practice***International Journal of Economic Perspectives*,14(7),7-16Retrieved from <https://ijeponline.org/index.php/journal/article>**Myth Criticism: Theory and Practice**

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Abstract

This paper delineates the various perspectives of Myth Criticism. Myth critics believe that myths can be subjected to different analyses. Myths use depth language, which conveys many meanings and has profound significance. Though the standard reason offered for the creation of myths is that early human societies needed to explain the events of the physical world, and lacking any explanation for such phenomena as storms and earthquakes, they created supernatural beings endowed with immense powers; a few critics also believe that the stories of gods are echoes of a vastly superior extra-terrestrial culture that visited earth in the distant past.


Keywords: Myth, Archetype, Anthropology, Mythic Consciousness, Psychology**INTRODUCTION**

Myth Criticism found its way through the rest of the critical theories owing to certain reasons: one, formalistic approaches no longer found favour with the reading public due to their narrowness; two, early twentieth century anthropology and psychology seemed very impressive and attractive in its scope and depth; and three, modern life was felt to be in a disastrous spiritual state partly due to the influence of existential philosophy. (Leitch 115-116). Vincent B. Leitch in *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties* (1988) states that myth Criticism began its influence in the field of literary criticism during the 1930s and the influence lasted until the 1980s. Its heyday can be marked between the 1940s and 60s. The popular myth critics were Richard Chase (1904-1988), Francis Fergusson (1904-1986), Leslie Fiedler (1917-2003), Daniel Hoffman (1923-), Stanley Edgar Hyman (1919-1970), Constance Rourke (1885-1941), Philip Wheelwright (1901-1970), Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), William Troy (1903-1961), Maud Bodkin (1875-1967) and Northrop Frye (1912-1991). Though these critics were not in contact with each other, they had a certain way of thinking dependent on the theories of myth often derived from European anthropology, philosophy, sociology and folklore studies.

MYTH CRITICISM: DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Myth Criticism is also the locus for a series of complex questions, as suggested by Charles Eric Reeves:

Is myth embedded in literature, or are myth and literature somehow coextensive? Is myth (from Greek mythos, "tale, story") inescapably narrative in form? Is all literature susceptible of myth criticism? How self-conscious are literary artists in the use or incorporation of myth? How does myth in, or as, literature evolve historically? Does a single governing myth, a "monomyth", organize disparate mythic narratives and dominate literary form? What tasks, besides a simple cataloging of putative mythic components, fall to the myth critic? And most fundamentally, what does "myth" mean in the context of literary criticism? (cited in Gill, "Archetypal Theory and Criticism")

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The diverse answers to these questions lead to a survey of myth criticism.

Myth Criticism had its impetus mainly from Sir James Frazer and Carl G. Jung. Although myths take their specific shapes from the cultural environments in which they grow, similar motifs may occur in different mythologies. Certain images that recur in the myths of peoples widely separated in time and place tend to have a common meaning. They also elicit comparable psychological responses and serve similar cultural functions. Such motifs and images are called archetypes. “An archetype is an original pattern or prototype from which copies are made” (Smith, “Archetypal Criticism: Theory and Practice”). Thus, archetypal criticism focuses on recurrent patterns in literature and their parallels in folktale, dream, ritual and myth. Lyle E. Smith suggests an instance:

“Little Red Riding Hood’s wandering in the woods and confronting a wolf” is a fairy tale, “Jonah’s taking a sea voyage and being swallowed by a whale” is the Biblical myth, “Orpheus’ descending to the underworld to try to rescue Eurydice” is a Greek myth, and “the Ancient Mariner’s killing an albatross and having a perilous sea journey” is found in literature.(Smith)

All these are variations of a rebirth archetype in which the hero experiences a symbolic death and then is reborn, having gained special knowledge that can be brought back to the ordinary world. The main premise of archetypal criticism is that an understanding of such archetypes will help illuminate an individual literary text by connecting it to more universal patterns that often transcend literature itself. An archetype can take several shapes—myth, dream, religion, fairytale, fantasy etc. Thus, myths are just a part of an archetype. Myth critics believe that all literary works embody archetypes. Northrop Frye, one of the pioneers of myth criticism, considers archetypes as the “socially-concerned reorganizing forms and patterns of literature that originate in myth and which unify and reveal literature as an imaginatively inhabitable world” (Gill, “Northrop Frye”). According to myth critics, an understanding of why archetypal patterns reoccur will help the critic as well as the reader to connect the individual text to universal patterns in literature and everyday life. Several myth critics believe that myths can be subjected to different analyses. Myths use depth language, which conveys many meanings and has profound significance. Though the standard reason offered for the creation of myths is that early human societies needed to explain the events of the physical world, and lacking any explanation for such phenomena as storms and earthquakes, they created supernatural beings endowed with immense powers; a few critics also believe that the stories of gods are echoes of a vastly superior extra-terrestrial culture that visited earth in the distant past. As the awareness of the world grew more sophisticated, myths also became more sophisticated. Some myths focused on individuals, while the rest dealt with stereotypes. Since they are collective and in a sense, communal, they bring a sense of wholeness and togetherness to social life. In fact, the mythology of the classical world provided the themes for some of the world’s greatest drama, and similar themes can be traced in Renaissance literature through to Modern poetry. While myth criticism, in general, continues to draw freely on the psychology of Jung, social anthropology, the study of religions, metaphors and depth psychology, the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye attempted to redefine what criticism is, and what it can be expected to do (Gill).

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOLLOWED BY MYTH CRITICS

John B. Vickery in his *Introduction to Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice* (1966) enumerates certain basic principles followed by myth critics : one, “that the creation of myths is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need”; two, that “myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically”; three, that “myth provides a stimulus for the creative artist and it also provides concepts and patterns which the critic can use to interpret specific works of

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literature”; and finally, that “myth’s endeavor is to create a meaningful place for man in this world” (Vickery 1966, ix). Basically, all myth critics, through their different approaches, reintegrate the ‘Many’ into the ‘One’; that is, they try to establish the universality of myth. For instance, the American mythologist Joseph Campbell speaks of a ‘monomyth’ and he tries to locate the ‘One’ archetype from the ‘Many’ archetypes.

Though the myth critics followed certain fundamental assumptions, they adopted different approaches in practice. They relied on anthropologists and mythologists like Sir James Frazer and philosophers like Ernst Cassirer for their knowledge and understanding of myth. For instance, Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is an all-inclusive account of myths and rituals. He traced the origin of myths in rituals and rituals in magic; and suggested through these that human beings connected themselves with spiritual forces. As these forces took over the social practices, they started losing their original meaning. However, each myth critic adopted his own unique idea in the interpretation of a literary work. While Stanley Edgar Hyman adopted a ritualistic approach to myth (for example, in his essay “The Ritual View of the Myth and the Mythic”, he endorses M. A. Murray’s 1914 essay “Hamlet and Orestes” as “a brilliant comparative study in the common ritual origins of Shakespeare and Greek Drama”) (Hyman 2007, 54), Richard Chase was in favour of a narrative approach (in his essay “Myth as Literature”, he suggests that Yeats’ poem “Among School Children” uses the myth of Leda and the Swan and points out that it is an example of a poem becoming mythical within itself out of its own structural and emotive necessity, and here Leda is just not a Greek maiden but several images sorted through the soul of Yeats) (Chase 184-5), Cassirer chose a cognitive approach (in *The Myth of the State*, he applies his logic of myth in primitive mentality to the problem of the nature of modern political myths. He borrows from the philosophy of Kant and regards myth as having its own logic, which enables him to both distinguish from and relate to human culture as a whole) (Cassirer 279-280), Philip Wheelwright chose a combination of ritual, narration and cognition, and Jung adopted a psychological approach. Jung also gave spiritual interpretations of mythic creations along with cognitive, narrative and cathartic functions of myth (Leitch 117-118).

Vincent B. Leitch further suggests that myth critics also sought to discover the formal, psychological, thematic, historic and cultural link that myth shares with literature: formal, in the sense of features of plot, character, theme and image; psychological, in the sense of human beings’ original modes of responding to reality; thematic, in the sense of the genesis of the world and people, the foundations of society and law and the nature of the Gods and demons; historical, that is, as a source, influence or model for literature; cultural, that is, narratives imparting knowledge and wisdom that reinforce social and spiritual beliefs (Leitch 120).

According to the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), the first science that should be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of fables. He believed that myth had its sources in history, and that the best method to ancient divine wisdom and knowledge was to interpret the myths of a culture. He termed this interpretation “genealogical” interpretation. He examined the history of ancient customs, deeds and ideas through interpretation of fables to derive the principles of human nature and history. In fact, this genealogical interpretation is synonymous with historical interpretation. However, modern myth criticism frequently dealt ahistorically with hidden significance, with ancient types and with moral and spiritual meanings, as the discourse of myth was often secretive and paradoxical. This method of interpretation is not genealogical or historical, but allegorical. In allegorical interpretation, the search for a meaning is beyond the literal and moves into the spiritual limits of significance of the texts. This interpretation could be done in two ways, one, interpreting myths as allegories of natural phenomena and two, moral allegory, that is, interpreting myths to inculcate social and moral principles. In nature

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allegory, mythical beings are considered personifications of natural events. For instance, “the myth of Demeter and Persephone depicts the regular recurrence of winter and summer. The crashing of thunderbolts seems the bravado display of some colossal being, Zeus the thunderer” (Day 37). From the Indian point of view, we have Indra, “the king of heaven [...] who inhabited the sky, the firmament between earth and the sun, who rode upon the clouds, who poured forth the rain, hurled the forked lightning upon earth, and spoke in the awful thunder” (Garrett 230-231). The moral allegory theory is didactic, in the sense that it provides guidelines to lead a morally disciplined life. For instance, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are often treated as moral allegories. Similarly, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are treated as moral allegories. These texts are often interpreted and re-interpreted to provide lessons in morality.

Another aspect of myth criticism talked about frequently is its ever-present focus on destruction. Logos was placed against mythos. Myth critics took special pride in demythifying texts. One major aim of myth criticism was to question the truthfulness and meaning of myth. Myth criticism also risked the transformation of living archetypes into stereotypes. However, Maud Bodkin was of the opinion that mythical interpretation could be subtle, pliant and yielding itself to serve and follow the living imaginative activity.

MYTH CRITICISM: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The sociological mode of myth criticism was especially popular in America during the post World War II period. Several critical texts made significant additions to knowledge by unearthing what could be called distinctively American archetypes. For instance, Constance Rourke’s *American Humor* (1931), Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), R.W.B Lewis’ *The American Adam* (1955), Richard Chase’s *The American Novel and its Tradition* (1957), Leslie Fiedler’s *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) and Daniel Hoffman’s *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (1961) produced detailed studies of archetypal American characters, themes, plots, images, genres and settings (Leitch 131). Here, myth criticism is being employed for purposes of literary nationalism. These essays also reveal the fact that the American soil is a fertile ground of folktale, myth and archetype. Daniel Hoffman, for instance, was of the opinion that “American romance was a nonrealistic, poetic prose genre typically featuring a journey of self-discovery—a quest for (national) identity—cut off from the traditions of the Old World and seeking fresh myths for a new land” (quoted in Leitch 132). Though the old world traditions were discarded, they still formed the background for the American romance. Nevertheless, the depiction of the American hero by Hoffman was very different from the hero developed by Joseph Campbell. Hoffman’s mythical hero has no past, patrimony, siblings, family or even a life cycle. That is, the American hero was thoroughly different from the European hero as described by the leading myth critics. This American hero was the creation of an independent, indigenous folk whose cultural vision and social life were peculiar to itself.

MYTH CRITICISM: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE

Joseph Campbell, however, adopted the religious approach to myth criticism. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), he attempted to disclose the timeless human patterns in myth and literature (Leitch 133). This religious approach was more in favour of allegory than genealogy. Its point of view was deeply religious and unitarian, similar to the Eastern religions. However, it is quite close to the work of Jung, Bodkin and Wheelwright and a polar opposite to the sociological approach of Hoffman, Richard Chase and Leslie Fiedler (Leitch 133). Several times, Campbell almost explicitly endorses Jung’s interpretation of myth. For instance, having noted his own interpretation of myths as archetypes or universal patterns, he says, “The psychologist who has best dealt with these, best described and best interpreted

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them, is Carl Jung[...]” (quoted in Dundes 262). For Campbell, mythic forms were everywhere the same beneath regional variations. All heroes were one hero and all myths were one myth. Thus, he enlarged upon the aspect of ‘monomyth’—the term was borrowed from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. He devoted himself primarily to pure “Archetype” free from “Signature”. According to him, modern society is in turmoil because modern man finds life meaningless. Modern man is bereft of myths because science has refuted myths. For him, the real meaning of myth is symbolic and the symbolic meaning of myth is psychological. He also believes that when accepted, myth gives meaning to life and can thus restore tranquillity to society. However, one criticism against Campbell’s approach is that he constructs a composite hero pattern based on bits and pieces from many different myths and legends and that no one legend is analyzed in full.

MYTH CRITICISM: FORMALIST PERSPECTIVE

A formalist approach to myth criticism was brought about by Francis Fergusson through *The Idea of a Theater* (1949), which studied the details of ten plays within the context of a general theory of drama informed by myth criticism. Fergusson was deeply influenced by British anthropology and in his explanations; he relied heavily on the notions of ritual and myth. For instance, he considered Oedipus ‘a dismembered king and scapegoat’ in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (Leitch 133). In fact, *Oedipus Rex*, for him, is a combination of a ‘fundamental histrionic dimension’, a ‘primitive performative substratum’ and an ‘ancient ritual’, which gave an awareness of the community (Leitch 134). Fergusson was deeply concerned with the specificities of individual works and the religious view of culture too. According to him, rationalism and philosophical idealism took over in the mid-seventeenth century, divorcing feeling and intuition from intellect and thought. Due to the triumph of the scientific mind, ritual, myth and organic community met with a disastrous end and myth was reduced to a lie. Thus, the task of criticism was to recover this lost traditional ritual sensibility, which was termed by several myth critics as ‘mythic consciousness’. Myth critics began to deplore modern man’s bifurcated sensibility, his loss of religion and his love for science. Fergusson’s formalist approach worked back reverently through concept and words to action and mystery lodged at the centre of communal life. The trajectory progressed from logos to mythos. Myth criticism also worked equally well as a critical instrument with poetry, drama or fiction and with any period of literature.

MYTH CRITICISM: PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Carl Jung followed the psychological approach and he located the impersonal, universal source of superior literature in the collective psyche, which he depicted as a sphere of mythology. He characterized the primordial images from this mythological realm as archetypes. These archetypes were located and given symbolic meanings. For instance, water, an archetypal image, stands for the mystery of creation, birth-death-resurrection, purification and redemption, fertility and growth. He also considered water the most common symbol for the unconscious. Jung introduced analytic psychology after splitting from a close professional relationship with Sigmund Freud. However, he went beyond Freud’s ideas of psychology and studied comparative mythology and anthropology. Sir James Frazer also influenced him. While Frazer thought that any similarities in myths between cultures were due to their influences upon one another, Jung thought that these similarities were due to something common in the unconscious mind of all humans. Thus, he developed the concept of the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious are the ideas, themes and symbols found in the entire human race. These symbols, also called archetypes, create what Jung calls the ‘Self’. The ‘Self’ can be viewed as an individual. The ‘mask’ is what the individual allows others to see. The ‘shadow’ is the evil side that the

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individual does not want others to see and actually rejects. The 'Anima' is the feminine side of the male individual and the 'Animus' is the masculine side of the female individual. According to Jung, all these archetypes—shadow, Anima, Animus and Spirit—create the Syzygy, or the unified whole. People attempt to attain this unified whole. This search is called the Quest, which in turn, leads to the Night-Sea-Journey, a quest where a person is born, dies, and is reborn. This is exactly what is found in works of literature (Gill, "Archetypal Theory and Criticism"). Jung's key ideas about literature are expressed in his early essay, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" (1922). Here, Jung distinguished between "an inferior mode of literature, characterized by the author's successful assertion of his conscious intentions and aims against the unconscious demands of his work, and a superior mode characterized by the poet's subordination to the requirements of his art object" (quoted in Leitch 120-121). According to Jung, the creative impulse becomes strong with the latter and this impulse is a reflection of the collective unconscious. He also believed in the affective power of literature, which emerged from the activation of mythological materials and swept away the individual consciousness, will, and intention of both the readers and the authors. Thus, Jung's theory had its foundations in ancient mythology and the collective unconscious. He also emphasized the didactic value and the autonomy of literature. According to him, the cultural education given by literature compensated the inadequacies of the present, serving broadly to balance and improve the spirit of man. For Jung, any work of literature possessed a fundamental aesthetic independence. Within the realm of aesthetics, the literary object appeared an impersonal, autonomous, organic form.

Thus, Jung took Freud's probing of mythic origins several steps further. Jung suggested that man is born with an inherited disposition to behave and think in certain ways. As man has evolved, he has accumulated several patterns of thinking. These patterns are handed down to each succeeding generation and thus man, through the ages, receives a larger and more complex store of memories. The myths of a society express in an elaborate and decorative form this storehouse of patterns and racial memories. Each human mind is given the power to think in mythic terms. A few share certain primordial shapes or images of thought. Even if the dreams of normal people or the visions of neurotic people are not fully developed myths, they do have traceable mythic components. For Jung, mythic elements or symbols were of great importance because they allowed the mind to deal with that which was yet unknown or was only in the process of formation. In other words, the mind deals with the world through the intervention of the archetypes, and when the archetypes cannot be made to fit a view of the world, it results in chaos. Jung's conclusion is a powerful case of myth as a producer of order out of chaos: "the mythology of a tribe is its living religion, whose loss is always and everywhere, even in the case of civilized man, a normal catastrophe" (quoted in Ausband 12-13).

Maud Bodkin was largely influenced by Jung's theories. In *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934), she combined Jungian theories, especially those of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, with concepts from Freudian psychoanalysis and British anthropology. Specifically, she studied in detail, the rebirth archetype, the paradise-Hades archetype, the betrayed-betrayer woman archetype, and the archetypes of devil, hero and God. She offered several instances of myth criticism in literature, which include the scrutiny of Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" and T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Bodkin, however, resisted the Jungian temptation to universalize and she credited the impact of historical conditions on the formations of particular versions of archetypes. According to her, "the images studied of man, woman, God, devil, in any particular instance of their occurrence in poetry can be considered either as related to the sensibility of a certain poet, and a certain age and country, or as a mode of expressing something potentially realizable in human

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experience of any time or place” (quoted in Leitch 122). Her theory of literature also emphasized the roles of personal unconscious and social history in literature. She, in fact, wanted to develop a reception criticism based on an affective conception of art because she believed that poetry communicated a communal knowledge of archetypal characters, plots and themes in an intensely emotional manner. She distinguished between the scientific and poetic uses of language and thus the literal truth of reference found in the discourse of science from the suggestive visionary truth of reference produced in the discourse of poetry. The key to Bodkin’s mimetic poetics was ritual dance, which operated as a model of complete communication in the arts. For Bodkin, mimesis involved “an alluring embodiment of numinous reality rather than an accurate mirror-like reflection of it” (quoted in Leitch 123). Thus, even though Bodkin’s conception of literature generously allowed for textual, didactic, expressive and affective dimensions of imaginative works, the criticism against Bodkin’s approach is that she assigned a vague place to the mimetic powers of poetry. Similar to Bodkin, Leslie Fiedler relied heavily on Jungian psychoanalysis in developing his unique system of mythopoetics. He, too, found it necessary to reserve a place for the personal unconscious while maintaining the role of the collective unconscious. As a Marxist, Fiedler was especially concerned to provide for sociological and historical factors shaping writers and their works during any given period. In his “Archetype and Signature” (1952), Fiedler deliberately chose the terms ‘archetype’ and ‘signature’ rather than ‘myth’ to explain his poetics. His ideas on these terms have been summarized by Vincent Leitch:

“Archetype” for him [Fiedler] designated “any of the immemorial patterns of response to the human situation in its most permanent aspects.” The Archetype belonged to the realm of the metapersonal, the unconscious, the id, and the community at preconscious levels. “Signature” meant “the sum total of individuating factors in a work;” it belonged to the domain of the ego and superego—the personality and the social collectivity—at conscious levels. Literature, properly speaking can be said to come into existence at the moment a Signature is imposed upon the Archetype. (Leitch 124)

According to Fiedler, myth and folktale are pure archetypes and unlike them, literature exhibited individuating traits of not only genre, diction, metre and imagery, but also of social rules and historical conventions, which changed from place to place, time to time, and author to author. Fiedler’s formulation provided a role for biography, history and aesthetics, as well as ritual, folktale and myth. In other words, he fashioned a way of uniting literature and non-literature without sacrificing literature’s power of transporting the readers to the realm of the marvellous. With his special interest in the ordinary reader and his concept of Signature, Fiedler studied the popular literature of America. He redefined the Jungian archetype as a socially determined formation and a combination of Signature-Archetype. He also investigated the latest homegrown myths instead of the primitive folk works. In most of his finest criticism, he uncovered the American archetypes. As far as Fiedler was concerned, whatever a society repressed returned in its literature. This dialectical concept of repression-compensation could be found in Jung’s archetypal criticism, which was used by Fiedler in his conception of art. For Fiedler, this cultural mechanism was a moral force and a cause for hope.

Philip Wheelwright in *The Burning Fountain* (1954) waged an assault on simple concepts of representation and realism. He introduced a new language exclusively for myth criticism, which has nothing to do with logical positivism. He criticized the literal, logical discourse of science and termed it as steno language. He differentiated steno language from the discourse of myth in these terms: “Steno language was dogmatically limited to the public domain of law and necessity, of technical and conventional ‘truth’, and of denotation and monosignation [...] Unlike steno-language, the translogical, expressive discourses of myth,

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religion, and poetry opened a private realm of possibility and freedom, of deep and integral truth, and of connotation and plurisignation” (quoted in Leitch 125). For instance, in his criticism of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, he says that *King Lear* is great because through poetic devices like language, imagery, character and plot, a depth meaning is revealed which in turn reveals the truths and quasi-truths of high importance about human nature, old age, false reasoning and self-confrontation through suffering. Thus, Wheelwright defended the suggestive, paradoxical discourse of myth against the declarative, univocal language of logic and science. He associated mimesis and realism with rigid scientific literalism; and like other myth critics, he opposed the possible to the real, the paradoxical to the known, and the mysterious to the actual. In a secular age of science, he sought to keep alive the spiritual sense of a beyond. He was deeply offended by dogmas of plain sense and declarations against religious consciousness and thus deplored positivism, materialism and naturalism. Like Bodkin, he wanted to move modern aesthetics towards mysticism. Wheelwright’s interpretations are a direct reflection of all these feelings and aims. He also tried to link the narrative and the cognitive dimensions of myth in the field of poetics. For him, poetry, like myth, was a narrative mode of apprehending reality. According to him, myth and poetry shared with ritual “a drive for communal participation in the something beyond” (Leitch 126). The most distinctive factor about Wheelwright’s theorizing on myth and literature is his strong view of affective poetics. According to him, a response to literature depended on apprehending its deep truths and wisdom in a spirit of awe and wonder.

Northrop Frye’s criticism, however, emphasizes the thematic, narrative and archetypal similarities among literary works rather than the explication of single texts. He attempted a general theory of literature, which he approached from four perspectives in his four essays in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). In the first essay, he depicted a historical pattern of five literary modes found in classical and post-classical literature. These five literary modes are myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic and irony. In each of the five modes, literary works could be sophisticated or naive and tragic or comic. Thus, numerous possible combinations evolved: sophisticated comic romance, naïve low mimetic tragedy etc. Sometimes, one mode might be dominant in a work and the other recessive in the same work of art. Thus, a pattern of oppositions structured Frye’s system. He also believed that a dissociation of sensibility occurred in Western culture, creating two domains—mythological universe and the scientific universe. In the second essay, he put forward a theory of symbols, recognizing five levels that ranged from the ordinary to the anagogic. Leitch gives a description of this:

In its “descriptive” phase, literary language was referential; in its “literal” phase, it was nonreferential; in its “formal” phase, it offered autonomous, exemplary images; in its “mythical” phase, it communicated archetypes; and in its “anagogic” phase, it presented symbols of the whole of existence unconstrained by references, examples, or the known.

(Leitch 138)

This suggests the formalistic approach of Frye towards interpretation.

The theory of myths that forms the third essay has possibly been Frye’s most influential contribution. This essay explained what was involved in the work of archetypal or myth criticism. He starts by identifying the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn and winter—with the four main plots or ‘mythoi’ of romance, comedy, tragedy and irony. These are further broken down into phases, each having six cyclical phases; thus twenty-four forms. The four mythoi constituted aspects of a central unifying quest-myth. In other words, all literary genres derived from the quest myth. In this essay, Frye also distinguishes between signs and motifs. While signs point outward to things beyond them, motifs are understood inwardly as parts of a verbal structure. For Frye, in literature, the sign-values are

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subordinate to the interconnectedness of motifs. The final essay proposes a theory of genres, where Frye outlined the differences between the lyric, epic and dramatic work. It also examined the literary conventions of diction, rhythm and visual presentation in epic, fiction, drama and lyric. Frye's focus was mainly on western literature and its classification. His detailed work on literary structure and symbolism established Frye as one of the most eminent scholars in Canadian history and led to the publishing of more books on myth and archetypal theory. Frye suggested that literary criticism was a science as well as an art. He was also of the opinion that Aristotle, although he never used the term archetype, was the first archetypal critic because of the way he discussed the archetypes of tragedy in a methodical and open-minded manner. He was not much in favour of Jung's theory of collective unconscious. He viewed this theory as an unnecessary hypothesis in literary criticism.

Frye considered the Bible to be the primary source for undisplaced myth in the post-classical western tradition. He considered it the central encyclopaedic work in the mythical mode. He noted that several images, symbols, character types, plots, tropes and genres are derived from the Bible. He suggested that the Bible is a single archetypal structure extending from creation to apocalypse. Thus, Frye's conviction was that the total mythopoeic structure of concern extends beyond literature and moves into the realm of religion, philosophy, political theory and history. He suggested that myth could powerfully organize our thinking about literature and culture. He also showed through his analyses that myth criticism might ultimately connect with a larger theory of culture. The modern critic, according to Frye, "is a student of mythology, and his total subject embraces not merely literature, but the areas of concern which the mythical language of construction and belief enters and informs. These areas constitute the mythological subjects, and they include large parts of religion, philosophy, political theory, and the social sciences" (Frye 1971, 98).

Leitch further notes that among the obvious reasons for the quick acceptance of myth criticism was its flexibility. It worked as a critical instrument on any genre from any period and place. In addition, it apparently posed no singular or radical threat to the established canon of great works. In several fields, it had the immediate effect of enriching understanding of already acknowledged masterpieces. Myth criticism was easily adapted to the existing dominant patterns of inquiry. It could function as a flexible formalist methodology. Myth criticism could tolerate almost any politics, religion and critical approach. Its practitioners had a sense of community, optimism, work to be done and transcendence. Neither science nor technology could match myth criticism in its range and comprehensiveness, in its power to adopt multiple perspectives and in its ability to explain all human artifacts and imagination. Thus, the application of myth criticism takes us far beyond the historical and aesthetic realms of literary study back to the beginning of man's oldest rituals and beliefs (Leitch 144-147).

CONCLUSION

Thus, myth criticism came up as a reaction against the concept of an absurd godless scientific world, yearning for spiritual significance. Myth criticism assumes that a literary work contains symbols, images, motives and characters that bring about the same emotions and responses in all people. Each of these mythological elements (archetypes) aids in the interpretation of the work. Myth Criticism can show the importance of an author's imagery and explain why it is powerful. It can also be used in the study of mythopoeia (myth making). It is a form of inquiry about the complex relations between literature and myth. These inquiries are heterogeneous because they connect so many disciplines through interdisciplinary issues.

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